

# Bishops letting opportunity slip away

By Father Richard P. McBrien  
Syndicated columnist

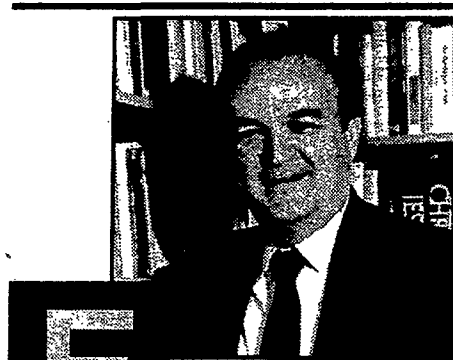
Peter Steinfels, religion writer for *The New York Times* and a visiting professor at the University of Notre Dame this year, has written an important column on sexual misconduct in the priesthood in the Oct. 8, 1994 edition of the paper.

It's not just another run around the well-trod journalistic track. Steinfels argues — convincingly, I think — that the U.S. Catholic bishops are at this very moment missing a critical opportunity to deal constructively with this tragic problem.

Steinfels draws upon the wisdom of Father Canice Connors, a priest-psychiatrist who has displayed much good sense and honesty about this whole sad business. When Father Connors is asked to describe the church's current situation, he quotes a line of poetry by Sister Jessica Powers: "Time's cupped hand holds no place so lenient, so calm, as this, the moment after suffering."

It is precisely now, at this "moment after suffering," when the media's attention has at least temporarily moved in other directions, that the bishops should be taking advantage of the lull before the next possible storm of negative publicity.

For the past decade, Steinfels notes, the bishops have always appeared to be one step behind the snowballing issue. Their posture has been reactive rather than proactive. Now that they seem to have an opportunity to be proactive for a change, nothing seems



## ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

to be happening.

The bishops are meeting this month in Washington, D.C., and, among other business to come before them, they will receive a report from their Ad Hoc Committee on Sexual Abuse, chaired by Bishop John Kinney of Bismarck, N.D.

The Kinney committee has already reviewed the policies and practices of more than 160 dioceses around the country regarding the handling of sexual abuse cases, and has readied some two dozen recommendations for revising and improving procedures.

Contrary to the appearance of progress, however, Steinfels has been informed by a source in the bishops' conference that a backlash against the Kinney committee has already developed among the bishops.

Under the immediate pressure of

the media spotlight, the bishops were more than willing to support the creation of a special committee to investigate the situation. But now that the spotlight has been turned away, they are showing signs of reluctance to cooperate.

For example, when Bishop Kinney's committee sought to determine the amount of money that dioceses have paid out in legal settlements and for therapy for offenders and victims alike, a majority on the 50-member Administrative Committee of the bishops' conference rejected the request.

The Administrative Committee, according to reports, also insists that the data already gathered remain in the hands of the ad hoc committee and not be released to the public.

The Steinfels column, however, raises an issue that is much wider than the gathering and release of data. In this period of relative calm, he writes, "the bishops are still resisting the reality that sexual misconduct by priests is perceived as a national problem, not just a collection of local problems, and therefore a problem requiring a concerted national response."

Included in this "concerted national response" would be a more careful, probing and honest look at seminaries.

Too many bishops continue to play the "numbers game." They count the number of parishes without pastors and they check the rising median ages of their priests, and they panic. For public consumption, however, they reassure their flock that prayer and the Lord will eventually take care of the

problem.

They turn instinctively, and not illogically, to the seminaries. If the church is to solve the growing priest-shortage within the limits of present church discipline (no married priests; no women priests; no resigned priests readmitted to the priesthood), it has to increase enrollments in seminaries, by whatever means. In some cases, these means include the acceptance of candidates expelled from other seminaries — with no questions asked. Almost anyone who has ever served on a seminary faculty knows how disastrously short-sighted and irresponsible that practice is.

Against just such practices as these, Father Connors proposes that the bishops establish "minimum national criteria for admission to seminaries." It does no good, in other words, to clean up the mess in the pool if more of it continues to flow in through the pipeline.

Steinfels correctly identifies the two-fold source of the bishops' failure to deal effectively with the problem.

The first is the theologically erroneous notion that each diocese is a kind of sovereign ecclesiastical state, answerable only to the pope. This reflects a misunderstanding of the church's collegial nature.

The second source of the bishops' failure is their almost supine, fear-driven dependence on their lawyers. Instead of responding to these terrible tragedies like pastors, they respond like clients.

Meanwhile, "the moment after suffering" slips away.

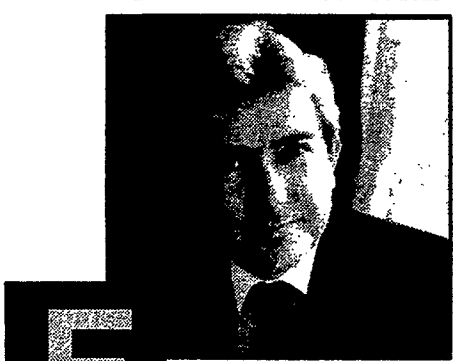
## Where do you fall on job-satisfaction index?

By Gregory F. Augustine Pierce  
Syndicated columnist

Are you content in your work? People are constantly being asked this question, and their answers vary widely. Some polls, for example, show that many people are unhappy about their jobs, while other surveys indicate that most people are satisfied about what they do for a living.

I think part of the problem is that the question is too vague. To remedy the situation, I have developed the "Pierce Job Satisfaction Index," which consists of 10 simple questions that require either a "yes" or "no" answer:

1. After a vacation or long weekend, do you look forward to (or at least willingly accept) going back to work?  Yes  No
2. Do you believe that the work you do has value, that it helps other people or society in general?  Yes  No



## FAITH AND WORK

3. Are you adequately — perhaps not richly, but adequately — compensated for your labor?  Yes  No
4. Do you basically enjoy most of the

people you work with (even if some of them drive you nuts sometimes)?  Yes  No

5. Do you feel that, barring a catastrophe, your job is reasonably secure for the foreseeable future?  Yes  No
6. Does your work leave you an acceptable — not necessarily desirable, but acceptable — amount of time and energy for yourself and your family and friends?  Yes  No
7. Is your work challenging enough to keep you engaged (if maybe not enthusiastic) most of the time?  Yes  No
8. Can you do your job without violating any of your major values or ethical principles?  Yes  No
9. Are the physical conditions under which you do your job tolerable — not perfect, but tolerable?  Yes  No
10. Would you be pleased — not necessarily ecstatic, but pleased — to have a son or daughter or close friend have a job like yours?  Yes  No

Here's how my index works. If you score nine or 10 "yeses," then it says you "love" your job and should consider yourself among the blessed.

Seven or eight yeses means you "like" your job and ought to stay where you are.

If you answered five or six affirmatively, you are "ambivalent" about your work and should probably look for ways to improve your situation.

Only three or four "yeses" means you "dislike" your job and should try to find something else if possible.

If you could answer "yes" to only one, two or even none of the questions, then the index shows you definitely "hate" your job and must do everything within your power to find some other work immediately ... for your own spiritual well being.



JET WEST TOURS

Santotours

LAS VEGAS & ATLANTIC CITY  
HAWAII • CARIBBEAN • FLORIDA

FREE

Kodak Funtime Camera  
First 100 Reservations  
of Air and Hotel Package  
to Above Mentioned Locations

FREE

INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP JUNKETS

Your  
"Best Bet"  
Hotline

220 Turk Hill Park  
Fairport, NY 14450

223-3710



FINE FOOD GIFTS  
of CHEESE, FRUITCAKE  
and BOURBON FUDGE

made by the Monks of the Abbey of Gethsemani.  
Cheese served at the White House - Fruitcake  
rated #1 by Newsday (flavored with Kentucky Bourbon).

For a free catalog write:

Gethesemani Farms • Box 146 • Trappist, KY 40051  
Fax: 502-549-4124

Prompt delivery, with satisfaction guaranteed.  
Available all year round. Prices include delivery (in USA).